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## **Scientific abstracts vs. simplified readers: Investigating the effect on the affect**

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### **Abstract**

This content-analytic study compares and contrasts the effect of an intensive scientific abstract reading programme and an extensive reading programme on the attitudes to reading among learners of English. A large body of research advocates the benefits of extensive reading programmes, which resonates with the perceptions of many language teachers. If time on task is a primary factor, as is claimed for vocabulary acquisition (Nation, 2001), then extensive reading should win hands down. A number of studies have compared extensive and intensive reading; however, there is a paucity of research comparing the effect on the affective domain. Postgraduate students of science and technology enrolling for the same English course were assigned to either the extensive or intensive reading programmes. Four reading attitude variables, namely: comfort, anxiety, value and self-perception (Yamashita, 2004) were surveyed prior to and after the programmes using questionnaires and focus group interviews. The focus of the intensive scientific reading programme was on conforming to expectations within the community of practice with an emphasis on establishing the significance and novelty of the research. The focus of the extensive reading programme was on promoting pleasure reading by encouraging learners to read graded readers, starting with a headword level that they should be able to easily understand. Reading progress was tracked online using Kyoto Sangyo University's Moodle Reader module. Qualitative and quantitative content analysis was applied to the data collected. The preliminary results of the analysis will be disseminated and their application to classroom practices will be suggested.

### **I. Introduction**

There is a substantial body of literature extolling the virtues of extensive reading (ER). The Extensive Reading Foundation (2010), whose aim is to promote extensive reading in English as a foreign language, maintains a bibliography of works on extensive reading in a second language with over 500 publications starting from 1919. Advocates of ER appear to be particularly vocal in Japan. Waring (2009) puts forward a number of arguments in support of ER, three of which are:

- (1) Extensive Reading is an effective means for learners to revisit language that is being learned and recycling said language that learners are in the process of acquiring.
- (2) Books are the ready-made and low-cost materials that facilitate the acquisition of language with regards to multiple meanings, collocations, or colligations.
- (3) The amount of time that is required for language acquisition is extreme and the time requirements cannot be met in a weekly classroom setting.

While ER involves learners in reading texts for enjoyment, intensive reading (IR) involves learners in reading texts in detail in order to achieve particular learning aims or complete learning tasks. Commonly harnessed IR tasks include items such as matching headings to paragraphs, filling in the gaps, and putting jumbled up sentences or paragraphs in the correct order. Language can be studied in an academic manner for the sake of understanding how the language operates and how to extract meaning from a text rather than as a means for communication. Dead languages, such as Latin, are often taught in this way. Advocates of ER in Japan often cite that the overemphasis on dissecting texts and understanding grammar in the school system is a key factor that negatively affects learner motivation to continue with their English studies. However, there is little research comparing the effect of intensive and extensive reading on the affective domain. This study therefore aims to begin to address this. It was hypothesized that if time on task is a primary factor, as is claimed for vocabulary acquisition by Nation (2001), then extensive reading should emerge as the clear victor. From a naïve standpoint, the focus on pleasure in extensive reading appears to give ER better odds to come out in front.

## **II. Method**

In this study the attitudes to reading among two cohorts of learners were measured before and after undertaking their respective extensive and intensive reading programmes.

### **A. Subjects**

All the learners were pursuing the degree of Master of Science in either materials science, knowledge science or information science at a university in Japan. Learners enrolled in a non-credit bearing English language course held twice a week were assigned to classes according to their performance in the pre-course placement test. The level of both classes was approximately pre-intermediate, but based on slight differences in their placement scores one group was designated as higher pre-intermediate (higher) and the other lower pre-intermediate (lower).

### **B. Survey**

Four reading attitude variables, namely: comfort, anxiety, value and self-perception (Yamashita, 2004) were surveyed prior to and after the reading programmes using questionnaires and focus group interviews. However, this study focuses on comparing attitudinal changes over the duration of a study programme, whereas Yamashita's focus was on identifying differences and similarities in attitude for reading in first and second languages.

### **C. Programmes**

Both reading programmes harnessed the Moodle learning management system as a way to guide learners through their respective programmes. Learners spent time in class becoming familiar with using Moodle, and undertaking related reading activities. The higher group was assigned to the IR group while the lower group was assigned to the ER group.

The higher group followed an intensive reading programme involving reading scientific research abstracts. Abstracts were extracted from journal articles and conference proceedings and were selected based on the interests of the class. The scientific abstracts were introduced in a standard way typical of the way that reading texts are introduced in course books as show in Table 1.

**Table 1: Order of items used for each scientific research abstract**

| Order | Item                       | Aim   |
|-------|----------------------------|---|
| 1     | Vocabulary                 | To provide essential vocabulary necessary understand text |
| 2     | Warmer                     | To raise interest in text                                 |
| 3     | Gist question              | To encourage learners to read whole text for meaning      |
| 4     | Specific questions         | To encourage learners to read in detail                   |
| 5     | Language-related questions | To increase understanding of grammar or lexis             |

The lower group followed an extensive reading programme where students were first placed at a comfortable reading level according to TOEIC scores and reading placement tests scores that were offered by the publishers of the graded readers being read, namely Oxford and MacMillan. Once students had familiarized themselves with the Moodle Reader Module from Kyoto Sangyo University and successfully levelled up once, they were required to read authentic graphic novels (e.g. Tintin) or e-books of classic illustrated comic books.

### III. Findings and conclusions

The content of the questionnaires was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The preliminary results of the analysis will be disseminated and their application to classroom practices will be suggested.

Given the fairly small sample size of only one class of learners for each group, the validity of generalizing from these results is questionable. However, this trial study has tested the water for other researchers to build on, and identify which type of reading is more likely to produce positive attitudinal gains in relation to reading in a far eastern context.

### References

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